NAXOS

The English Song Series • 18

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IRELAND

Songs

Five Poems by Thomas Hardy

We'll to the Woods

Sea Fever

Santa Chiara

Great Things

Youth's Spring Tribute

Roderick Williams, Baritone

Iain Burnside, Piano

John Ireland (1879–1962)
Songs

1	**Great Things (1925)** *(Thomas Hardy)*	**2:20**
	Three Songs to Poems by Thomas Hardy (1925)	**6:31**
2	I. Summer Schemes	2:07
3	II. Her Song	2:17
4	III. Weathers	2:07
5	**Sea Fever (1913)** *(John Masefield)*	**2:35**
6	**The Bells of San Marie (1919)** *(John Masefield)*	**2:21**
7	**Vagabond (1922)** *(John Masefield)*	**2:03**
8	**Santa Chiara (Palm Sunday: Naples) (1922)** *(Arthur Symons)*	**2:25**
	Two Songs (1928)	
9	I. Tryst (in Fountain Court) *(Arthur Symons)*	4:05
10	**During Music (1928)** *(Dante Gabriel Rossetti)*	**2:16**
	Marigold (Impression for Voice and Piano) (1913)	**11:07**
11	I. Youth's Spring-Tribute *(Dante Gabriel Rossetti)*	3:54
12	II. Penumbra *(Dante Gabriel Rossetti)*	4:10
13	III. Spleen *(Ernest Dowson)*	3:03
14	**I have Twelve Oxen (1918)** *(Anon.)*	**2:01**
	We'll to the Woods (1927) *(A.E. Housman)*	**7:34**
15	I. We'll to the Woods	2:44
16	II. In Boyhood	1:50
17	Spring will not Wait (piano solo)	3:00
	Five Poems by Thomas Hardy (1926)	**10:00**
18	I. Beckon to me	1:44
19	II. In my sage moments	2:48
20	III. It was what you bore with you	1:18
21	IV. The tragedy of that moment	1:54
22	V. Dear, think not	2:16
	Two Songs (1916) *(Eric Thirkell Cooper)*	
23	II. The Cost	1:47
24	**When I am dead, my dearest (1924)** *(Christina Rossetti)*	**1:50**
	Songs Sacred and Profane (1929-31) *(W.B. Yeats)*	
25	IV. The Salley Gardens	2:10
26	**Tutto è sciolto (1932)** *(James Joyce)*	**1:53**
27	**If there were dreams to sell (1918)** *(Thomas Lovell Beddoes)*	**2:33**

Roderick Williams, Baritone · Iain Burnside, Piano

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John Ireland (1879–1962)
Songs

John Ireland studied at the Royal College of Music where his composition teacher was Stanford. During the first decade of the twentieth century he worked as an organist, choirmaster and pianist, and established his name as a composer with works such as the *Phantasie Trio* (1906). The popular success of the song *Sea Fever* (1913), followed by the impact the *Second Violin Sonata* (1915-1917) made at its première brought Ireland a national reputation. From 1923 to 1939 he taught at the Royal College of Music where his pupils included Britten. He embarked on a disastrous marriage in 1926, which was quickly annulled, and a subsequent deep friendship with one of his pupils also ended painfully.

Ireland's primary inspirations were landscapes such as the Channel Islands, Dorset and Sussex, and in particular sites of antiquity, for instance, Chanctonbury Ring on the South Downs. To this may be linked the influence of pagan mysticism in the writings of Arthur Machen. Works reflecting these characteristics include the orchestral *The Forgotten Rite* (1913) and *Mai-Dun* (1920-21). The piano was an important medium for Ireland apparent in the *Piano Concerto* (1930), solo works like *Decorations* (1912-13) and *Sarnia* (1940-41), as well as in chamber works, for example, the three piano trios. Finally, as this recording shows, song was a powerful medium for him; his tally of 91 songs demonstrates his fastidious knowledge of English poetry which is reflected in the diversity of poets he set, for instance, A.E. Housman, Thomas Hardy, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Masefield.

Santa Chiara (Palm Sunday: Naples), composed in 1925 to a poem by Arthur Symons, is built around the emphatic melodic phrase of the piano introduction. For the middle verse the music takes on a shimmering, quasi mystical character that mirrors the poet's reverie as he looks out to sea. Such identification with nature, symbolic of a state of mind, is a recurring feature of Ireland's music. *The Salley Gardens* setting W.B Yeats is from the cycle *Songs Sacred and Profane* written between 1929 and 1931. Love, and in particular unrequited love, is another theme that Ireland expressed through his songs, and the bitter-sweet quality of Yeats's poem is perfectly encapsulated here**.** *Sea Fever* (1913) was hugely popular with audiences and singers in the inter-war years. It follows in the tradition of Stanford's *Songs of the Sea* and sets one of Masefield's *Salt-Sea Ballads*. The song was inspired by Jersey and its yearning strophic melody sails on an accompaniment that is varied with each verse and has rich harmonic colouring.

Ireland's first Hardy setting is *Great Things* (1925), a strophic ballad with a rollicking tune and swaggering accompaniment. Such high-spirits are not to be found in the *Three Songs to Poems by Thomas Hardy* composed the same year, which capture instead the darker, fatalistic side of the poet.

In the first song *Summer Schemes* there is another instance of Ireland's nature mysticism when the ardour of the lovers is matched by an ecstatic burst of birdsong evoked by the piano. The lonely melody of *Her Song* is riven with heartache, producing one of Ireland's most beautiful songs. *Weathers* has a lilting pastoral gait, the music turning from spring warmth to dank autumnal chill.

The Bells of San Marie (1919) and *The Vagabond* (1922) are further settings of Masefield. In the former the tolling bells accompany the folk-song-like melody, whilst the latter is a reminder of the fascination the Victorians and Edwardians held for the homeless unencumbered traveller as, for instance, in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Songs of Travel*. *Tryst* and *During Music*, composed in April 1928, are another setting of Symons and one by the painter/poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti respectively, which were published together as *Two Songs*. In *Tryst* the feeling of frustrated, pent up love is palpable in the music. *During Music* has a rippling arpeggio figure in the accompaniment, synonymous with the pianistic skills of the object of the lover's desire.

The first two songs of *Marigold* (1913) also set D.G. Rossetti; the poet of the third is Ernest Dowson. Described as an 'Impression' rather than a cycle, it is a fine work in scope and one of the first examples of Ireland's mature voice. Why the choice of *Marigold* for the title and why the description 'impression' is unknown, but the intensity of the music points to it relating to Ireland's private life. The songs present aspects of love; the piano writing is important in the creation of the emotion, as are the thematic connections between the songs.

Youth's Spring-Tribute presents the fulfilment of love in the context of spring imagery. Note the piano's short introduction which acts as a thematic motif in the other songs and also the 'singing' melody with florid arpeggios in the piano underlying the words 'and through her bow'rs' which is also a thematic thread. After the climax at 'your warm lips', a sequence of *pianissimo* chords follows in the treble of the piano; this is the first appearance in Ireland's music of a motif that became for him a symbol of passion to be evoked at moments of heightened intensity. In *Penumbra* though, love is lost as the sombre mood of the music suggests. The 'singing' motif from the first song recurs, at one point initially for the piano alone as a mournful commentary. *Spleen* opens with an angular phrase that suggests numbness; amidst the chromatic angst the 'singing' motif is heard again, but now stripped to the bare bones. At the end of this gloomy song though, a brief hallowed memory of happiness is snatched as the introductory bars of *Youth's Spring-Tribute* return. With its hearty tune, piquant harmonic touches and vivacious coda, *I have Twelve Oxen* (1918), setting an anonymous early English poem, represents the jauntier side of Ireland.

According to the composer and authority on Ireland's music, Geoffrey Bush, 'it was the gritty, grimly humourous, pessimistic and cantankerous Housman who spoke straight to the composer's heart' more than any other poet. This is apparent in the cycle *We'll to the Woods no more* (1927), and for a full understanding of the work's meaning to the composer reference to events in his personal life is necessary. Ireland was probably homosexual, but repressed his instincts in light of the social mores of his time. Several long lasting male friendships had begun with choristers when Ireland was organist and choirmaster of St Luke's, Chelsea, including Arthur Miller, to whom this work and several others were dedicated. But Ireland also enjoyed the company of women and in 1926 he embarked on his ill-fated, and probably unconsummated, marriage. The following year, Miller married too and the inflamed emotions of the cycle seem inextricably linked to these events. The thematically linked music is laden with a sense of loss and pain, as if Ireland was trying to draw a line under both relationships.

Structurally the cycle is unusual in that the final movement is for piano alone, an extension of Schumann's use of the piano epilogue in his songs. The cycle's title and first song is taken from the introductory poem to Housman's collection *Last Poems*. Sadness is established from the outset by the rocking accompaniment; gradually the music becomes more chromatic, finally bursting out in sorrow at the words 'Oh we'll no more, no more, to the leafy woods away'.

In Boyhood rises through the solemn inexorable tread to its pained climax, and the epilogue, *Spring will not wait* is headed by a quotation from *A Shropshire Lad*: 'Spring will not wait the loiterer's time/Who keeps so long away'. Although initially brighter in character, the music darkens as references to the songs are recalled. At the end the music that underpinned the words '*no more*' in the first song reappears, a heartrending image of Ireland's failure to find love with either a man or woman.

The *Five Poems by Thomas Hardy*, belong to the previous year, and in the poet's quest for female love it is perhaps possible to see Ireland's own ambiguous path to his marriage. *Beckon to me to come* is built around the gentle piano phrase of the opening bars. *In my sage moments* is heavy with chromatic tension, rising to an edgy climax at 'Come deign again shine' under which a version of Ireland's 'passion motif' occurs. A lighter,

almost carefree, mood is struck with *It was what you bore with you, woman*, but bleakness returns with the stark vocal line, hollow chords and even a hint of a funereal rhythm of *The tragedy of that moment*. *Dear, think not that they will forget you* opens with a recollection of the linking motif of the first song and at the words 'They may say: "Why a woman such honour" ', attains not only a tranquillity but also a sense of resolution to the cycle itself.

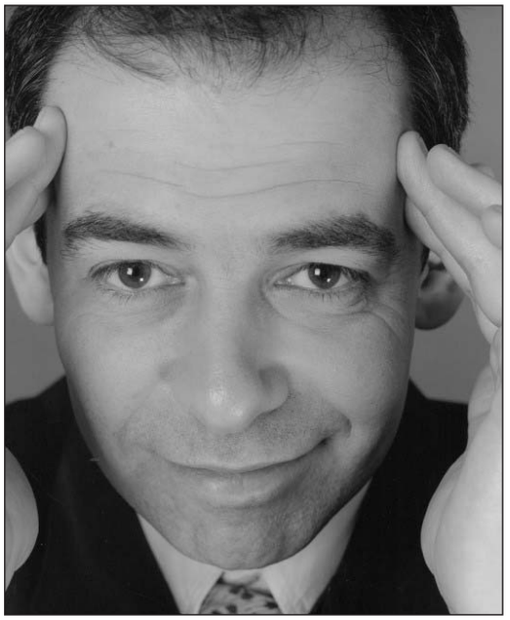
The Cost (1916) is the second of *Two Songs* set to poems from Eric Thirkell Cooper's collection *Soliloquies of a Subaltern*. It almost has the quality of a dramatic scena and climaxes in an anguished outpouring of grief as the poet pleads for his fallen comrade to return to life. *When I am dead my dearest* (1924) was another dedication to Arthur Miller, the inscription *To A.G.M., Cerne Abbas, June 1925*, referring to a holiday he and Ireland shared in Dorset. It sets Christina Rossetti's poem of hope despite bereavement in music of tender poignancy. *Tutto è sciolto* (1932) was Ireland's contribution to *The Joyce Book*, settings by thirteen composers of the collection *Pomes Penyeach* in honour of the poet. Although written in 1918, *If there were dreams to sell*, to words by Thomas Lovell Beddoes, has more the character of an Edwardian drawing-room ballad in which once again, as in so many of the songs recorded here, Ireland's skill at writing an instantly memorable tune is evident.

Andrew Burn

Roderick Williams

The baritone Roderick Williams encompasses a wide repertoire, from baroque to contemporary music, in the opera house, on the concert platform and in recital. He has enjoyed close relationships with Opera North and Scottish Opera, and is particularly associated with the baritone rôles of Mozart. He has also sung world premières of operas by, among others, David Sawer, Sally Beamish, Michael van der Aa and Alexander Knaifel. He has worked with orchestras throughout Europe, including all the BBC orchestras in the United Kingdom and his many festival appearances include the BBC Proms, Edinburgh, Cheltenham and Aldeburgh. His recital appearances have taken him to London's Wigmore Hall and many European festivals. He has an extensive discography and his recordings of English song with Iain Burnside have received particular acclaim. Roderick Williams is also a composer and has had works performed at the Wigmore and Barbican Halls, the Purcell Room and live on national radio in Britain.

Iain Burnside



Iain Burnside has performed with artists including Dame Margaret Price, Susan Chilcott, Galina Gorchakova, Yvonne Kenny, John Mark Ainsley, Mark Padmore, Bryn Terfel, Lisa Milne, Sally Matthews, and Jonathan Lemalu. As a broadcaster he has won a Sony Radio Award, and presents his own weekly BBC Radio 3 programme, combining his rôles as pianist and presenter in a number of series. His television involvement includes Cardiff Singer of the World, Leeds International Piano Competition and BBC Young Musician of the Year. He has devised concert series for the Bath Festival and The Crucible, Sheffield, the International Song Recital Series at the South Bank Centre and the Finzi Friends' triennial festival of English Song in Ludlow. He also teaches master-classes at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Julliard School, and the Banff Centre in Canada.

Although John Ireland is best remembered for his orchestral works, his 91 songs convey a peculiarly English quality of emotion expressed through reserve. The many gems on this recording include the bitter-sweet *Sea Fever* (1913), with its yearning strophic melody sailing on an accompaniment that is varied with each verse, the dark, fatalistic *Three Songs to Poems by Thomas Hardy* and the heart-rending *Her Song*, one of Ireland's most beautiful. Ireland's failure to find love is perhaps best expressed in the bleak cycle *Two Poems of A.E. Housman*.

John IRELAND
(1879–1962)

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Roderick Williams, Baritone
Iain Burnside, Piano

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(Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK / Bridgeman Art Library)

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